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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, May 5, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WASHING AND STORING BLANKETS." Information from the Bureaus of Home Economics and Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Publications available, Farmers' Bulletin 1497-F, Methods and Equipment for Home Laundering, and Leaflet 145-L, Clothes Moths.

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Do you remember, folks, how Chaucer felt about the month of May? "Farewell my booke and my devocioun." I always think May is one of the hardest months of the year in which to maintain one's devotion to duties indoors. Particularly when "duty" means putting the winter blankets away where the moths can't get at them! Nevertheless, the task must be done every spring, or we won't have any blankets. So let's get it over with.

Some of you have already crossed this item off your calendar. Some have not yet persuaded the family to give up those extra covers. That really makes it easier. You can clean a few at a time, when the day dawns just right -- bright, moderately warm, and breezy, for quick drying.

Must blankets always be washed before they are stored? Yes and no. They've been in constant use for many months, and usually need airing and freshening. If the bindings have been carefully protected and the surfaces have always been between the spread and the sheet, a good sunning and shaking may be enough. Or you could have the blankets dry-cleaned. But if they look a little dingy and you wish to freshen them at home, you'll probably wash them. See if the bindings or edges need mending, as you look them over.

Washing helps to dislodge any chance moth eggs in the blankets. The luke-warm suds and rinse waters will not actually kill any moth eggs or larvae, but may loosen them. Shaking and sunning will help. Experience has shown that moths do not attack clean woolen articles as readily as those that are soiled. Later on, when you wrap up the clean blanket with moth flakes, the fumes will destroy any eggs or larvae that might hatch out.

I understand that the U. S. Department of Agriculture has plenty of copies of Farmers' Bulletin 1497-F, which gives excellent directions for washing blankets and other woollens. I hope you will write for a copy. The title is "Methods and Equipment for Home Laundering." And there is a leaflet on clothes moths, No. 145-L, which you might also find useful at this season. Both publications are free.

In the first bulletin you would learn that wet woolen fibers are very sensitive to rubbing or rough handling, to extremes of heat and cold, to changes in temperature, and to any alkalis, such as strong soap, washing powder, or very hard water. So that's why the bulletin stresses lukewarm water for both washing and rinsing. It says that blankets must never be put into very hot or very cold water nor taken out of suds at one temperature and rinsed in clear water of a different temperature, or subjected to any sudden changes during washing. Nothing restores wool to its original condition after it has become shrunken or felted.

Blankets require a great deal of water in proportion to their bulk. A washing machine will usually take only one double blanket at a time, but do not cram the machine as full as you can get it. And do not agitate the blanket for long -- not nearly as long as you would cotton articles. Some people believe that blankets will come out softer and fluffier if they are washed by hand, squeezing them and working them in the suds without rubbing.

Soft water, free from impurities, is very desirable. Don't use strong washing powders to soften the water. Borax is safe. Use a mild neutral soap or soap flakes, well dissolved in the washing water before the blanket goes in. A soap solution or soap jelly dissolves evenly. Never rub soap directly on a blanket.

You can spin the blanket in an extractor if your washing machine has one, or wring it through a loosely set wringer. Be careful not to stretch the blanket as it goes through. Wash in a second suds of the same lukewarm temperature as the first, and rinse as quickly as possible in several lukewarm waters until no soap remains.

Hang the blanket out to dry with a half or a fourth on one side of the line. Or, better still, distribute the weight over several lines. Be sure the blanket hangs straight, so that it will dry straight and fold evenly. If there are colored stripes hang the blanket so that they are perpendicular to the ground. Then, if the dye should run, it won't run into the rest of the blanket.

The blanket will dry more quickly and evenly where there is a current of moderately warm air or a light breeze blowing. Squeeze the excess water out of the ends occasionally.

When the blanket is dry, raise the nap by brushing with a clean stiff whisk broom or with hand cards, such as are used for combing wool. The warmth of a blanket depends very largely upon the amount of nap. Look at the bindings or other edge finishes. If they need renewing, do so before putting the blanket away, so it will be in readiness on the first cool day.

However, be prompt about storing the clean blankets, if you wish to outwit the clothes moths. A tight cedar chest is a good place to keep them. Any tight box or container may be used, provided the edges are well sealed with gummed paper tape. An extra precaution is to sprinkle naphthalene flakes or paradichlorobenzene (para-di-chloro-ben-zene) crystals in the folds of the blanket before wrapping it up. With these repellent flakes, blankets can be put away in plain stout unbroken brown wrapping paper, if the edges are sealed with gummed paper tape.

The practical housekeeper labels each package in her storeroom so she can identify its contents without disturbing them needlessly.

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